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Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[15 February 2016]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Human Rights situation in the Ukraine

Crimea was illegally annexed by the Russian Federation in March 2014. Shortly afterwards an escalation of events in the Eastern part of Ukraine led to war. The pro-Russian fighters were heavily supported by Russia. Beside vulnerable civilians like women, children and the elderly and sick, minorities as the Roma in the Eastern part of Ukraine are suffering from the effects of war until today and the indigenous Crimean Tatar population is systematically persecuted on Crimea.

Ukrainian Roma communities face regular and systematic discrimination in most areas including access to education, housing services, health care, employment and social services. European Roma Rights Centre research shows most Roma children either graduate illiterate or leave school at an early stage, a high level of unemployment, deplorable living conditions and poor health status. In segregated schools with majority of Roma children the level of teaching is much lower. In media negative reports about Roma linked to crime and poverty dominate the picture. Also, the discrimination against Roma by medical professionals affects the access of Roma women to adequate health care. A majority of Roma women said they faced discrimination and degrading treatment by doctors and other hospital staff, and in some cases in the outright denial of health care treatment.

According to latest estimates during 2014 and 2015 more than 10,000 Roma people have fled from their places of residence in the Eastern part of the country. They are the most vulnerable group among the IDPs in Ukraine as many of them are not even recognized as legal citizens of Ukraine as 40% of all Roma in Ukraine (up to 400,000 Roma people live in Ukraine) have no personal documents. Information of the Roma Women's Fund "Chirikli" organization shows that 25% of the IDP's moved back to the Eastern part of Ukraine in 2015 and the beginning of 2016. They do not know what became of their houses but take the risk as they say: "It is better to live in a war area in my own house, than to live in foreign cities, like a street tramp." This statement clearly shows that the level of anti-Roma sentiments is so high in Ukraine that Roma don't feel safe there. They even return to the volatile regions where they are in great physical danger as the fighting has increased again over the last couple of weeks.

On Crimea the human rights situation has severely deteriorated since the annexation. The indigenous Crimean Tatars suffer most. On February 11th for instance, 11 Crimean Tatars were detained after wide spread searches of Crimean Tatar homes. Enver Bekirov, Emir-Usein Kuku, Vadim Siruk und Muslim Aliev must stay in custody at least until April 8th. All of them are civil society activists, namely Kuku is the representative of a human rights organization and regularly documented human rights violations on Crimea. In addition to these lately arrested persons Achtem Chiygoz, former vice-president of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, Ali Asanov and Mustafa Degermedzhi are in prison since winter 2015 without trial. Constant interrogations by the secret service FSB, arbitrary searches of homes, schools, mosques, and libraries, severe restrictions of the freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly create a climate of fear among the Crimean Tatar population. Numerous members of the Mejils have been interrogated repeatedly and threatened, the only Crimean Tatar TV Station ATR was forced to close down in April 2015, the severe Russian legislation against extremism and terrorism is used to persecute Crimean Tatars. Crimea is still isolated which means that access to Crimea for international institutions and independent experts from OSCE, the UN and the Council of Europe as well as NGOs and journalists is severely restricted.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the Human Rights Council

- To support all initiatives for an end to the war in the Eastern part of Ukraine.
- To support the government of Ukraine in the implementation of the "Action Plan Concerning the Implementation of the Strategy for Protection and Integration of Roma National Minority into Ukrainian Society for the Period until 2020 in close cooperation with the Roma organizations active in Ukraine and to empower the Government Commissioner for Ethnic Politics as well as cooperate with the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights.
- To support all initiatives for establishing a permanent international human rights monitoring mission on Crimea

- To call on the de facto authorities on Crimea to stop harassing the Crimean Tatars. Stop arbitrary searches of homes, schools, libraries, stop the detention of activists and guarantee the full freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly for Crimean Tatars.
- To call on the government of the Russian Federation as an occupying power to release the political prisoners Achtem Chiyygoz, Ali Asanov, Mustafa Degermedzhi